

Butler University Digital Commons @ Butler University

Undergraduate Honors Thesis Collection

Undergraduate Scholarship

2018

10 Pieces for Vincent: A Suite for Mixed Chamber Ensemble

Cade Leinbach **Butler University**

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ugtheses



Part of the Music Commons

Recommended Citation

Leinbach, Cade, "10 Pieces for Vincent: A Suite for Mixed Chamber Ensemble" (2018). Undergraduate Honors Thesis Collection. 453.

https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/ugtheses/453

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

BUTLER UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

Honors Thesis Certification

Please type all information in this section:

Applicant	Cade R. Leinbach (Name as it is to appear on diploma) 10 Pieces for Vincent: A Suite for Mixed Chamber Ensemble				
Thesis title					
Intended date of co	mmencement May 12 th , 2018				
Read, approved, ar	nd signed by:				
Thesis adviser(s) _	David Muray (for Dr. M. Scholle)	5-3-\8 Date			
Reader(s)		5- Date 20/9			
Certified by —		Date			
	Director, Honors Program	Date			
For Honors Program us	se:	Salaran (Bara) da di Salaran (Bara) (
Level of Honors cor	nferred: University				
	Departmental				

10 Pieces for Vincent: A Suite for Mixed Chamber Ensemble

A Thesis

Presented to the Composition Department of

Jordan College of the Arts

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Highest Honors in the College of the Arts

Cade R. Leinbach April 27, 2018

Program Notes for 10 Pieces for Vincent

Overview:

For my last year at Butler, I wanted to push myself and see how much music I could write within the limited time left. This led me towards writing a self-assigned senior project that was the culmination of all the knowledge and skills acquired in my four years at Butler. As for what instruments to write for, I wanted an ensemble that was larger and more diverse than any previous project. What I settled on was a chamber orchestra of my own design, with the instrumentation of flute, clarinet, tenor sax, trumpet, horn, bass trombone, violin, viola, cello, and percussion. This kind of ensemble provided equal representations of winds, brass, and strings, with a high, medium, and low voice for each family of instruments. It also provided a large variety of musical colors to experiment with.

When seeking a subject matter to base this composition on, I remembered a thought from freshman year about writing a piece on Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). He has always been an interesting figure to me, whose life I have wanted to study for quite some time. Over the summer of 2017, I read *Van Gogh* (1963) by Pierre Cabanne, which is mostly comprised of actual letters and writings from the man himself. Well known for being the epitome of the troubled artist, he is one of the most well-known painters in our culture. Yet, one fact that most people would not know is that, for most of his life, he did not consider himself an artist. Up until the age of 27, he pursued a life as a priest to follow in the footsteps of his father and because he was driven by a large sense of compassion to help others. Eventually, his bombastic personality, with drastic changes from over-zealous to depressed, led him to being forced out of the monastery. Afterward, Vincent wrote a letter to his brother and lifelong adviser, Theo,

declaring that he was planning to pursue a new life as a painter. Then, ten years to the day that he wrote this letter was sent, Vincent took his own life.

In the short time span of a decade, this incredibly misunderstood man created some of the most iconic pieces of art in our history. I found this fact astonishing and decided to make it the premise of this suite for chamber orchestra. Each movement is influenced by a distinct piece of art by Vincent, all of which are drastically different from one another, yet clearly connected. Some are bright, while others are dark, some are optimistic, while others are depressing, some depict city life, while others depict the lives of poor peasants in the country. The amount of eclecticism in his work was something that I admired and attempt to capture in my own music. As a whole, this suite is meant to depict both the art and life of Vincent, paying homage to a man who is still relevant in modern society, despite having died over 100 years ago.

Sunflowers:

Besides starry nights, Vincent is most known for his paintings of sunflowers. In fact, a quote from the artist himself states "that the peony is Jeannin's, the hollyhock belongs to Quost, but the sunflower is mine in a way." At multiple points in his life, Vincent dedicated versions of this painting to important people in his life. This painting then embodies all the love, positivity, and happiness that Vincent was capable of expressing.

This specific version of the painting is my personal favorite due to the strong reliance on only the color yellow. This color makes up most of the painting, except the stems and pits on the plants. Having this large saturation gives this painting a sense of brightness, which is

_

¹ Cabanne, Van Gogh. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1963), 184.

similar to the sun itself. Harmony in this movement captures the brightness of the painting by it being built entirely on perfect and consonant intervals. Another aspect of the painting I found inspiration in was that it is incredibly simple, consisting only of a vase with 15 sunflowers in it. However, upon extended observation, it becomes evident that it is difficult to differentiate the separate flowers from one another. Instead, they are so interconnected that they become a single entity. Melodies for this piece are treated in a similar fashion where, at the beginning, there is simply a single line being passed around the ensemble. This develops into a thicker texture of several different ideas being played at the same time, which, like the sunflowers, creates the whole sound.

Sorrow:

One of the earliest works by Vincent, this is the only sketch featured in the suite. To capture its contrast with the paintings, I decided to make it lack any sense of harmony, with the only occurrences being the overlaps between the independent instruments.

Perfectly capturing the mood of the title, this sketch is only made more sorrowful when the context behind it is shared. The woman in this sketch is named Sien. She was a prostitute and an incredibly toxic companion to Vincent. He met her while living in The Hague, first encountering her when she was wandering through the streets, bearing a child in her womb. Feeling an enormous amount of empathy for her, he took her in and cared for her and the child. Since he had no money to pay for a model to sit for him, he convinced Sien to allow him to draw her.² The three instruments featured in this movement (flute, clarinet, and viola) are then representative of Vincent, Sien, and the unborn child.

² Cabanne, 46-50.

Vincent never had healthy relationships and previous failures followed him throughout his life. The first woman he ever loved was already engaged to another man. When Vincent pronounced his feelings for her, she rejected him and uttered the phrase "no, never, never." This phrase grew to haunt Vincent and there for became the main motif of this movement. Capturing Vincent's own sorrow, these negative words are persistent throughout. ³

Tension builds both as symbolic of sorrow and in connection to the relationship between Vincent and Sien. Once Sien gave birth, she would stay out all night drinking while Vincent took care of her children. In the music, tension builds until it reaches the highest point, then slowly settles down to show the feeling of sinking into one's own sorrow. The ending, then, represents the heaviness of that, which weighs down like the gravity on Sien's head, buried in her arms. Finally, the last note captures the eventual separation between Vincent and those he tried to care for, with the viola being on a different pitch than both the flute and clarinet.

Avenue of Poplars in Autumn:

On both sides of this painting are beautiful, orange poplar trees that capture a clear image of autumn. The beginning and end of this movement work in the same way to frame it. A motif is passed around the ensemble that represents the falling of leaves. The pace speeds up at moments, as a large amount of leaves crash to the ground, or slows down, even pausing to resemble leaves floating in midair. In the middle of the painting is a clear blue sky. The music that represents this image is just as beautiful and free, with all the instruments moving at separately to create a transparent sound. Finally, the cello emerges from the texture to be

³ Cabanne, 41.

representative of the unknown person walking along the trail, away from the cabin. The face of the figure is hidden and unclear, but their figure suggests that they are female. Whether this person had any significance to Vincent it is unknown. However, their presence in the painting captures the beauty of living a simple rural life that he was so attracted to in his earlier work.

Skull with Cigarette

Between leaving The Hague and moving in with his brother in Paris, Vincent lived for a few months in Antwerp, Belgium. During this time, he created this painting as well as some of his darkest works, known as his "black" paintings. Still a novitiate of painting, he lacked skills and relied heavily on using the color black, hence the name. An ominous presence radiates off this painting that is the opposite to the positivity in *Sunflowers*. Utilizing set theory, the music is structured to have a mysterious character to it that is unclear, like the parts of the skeleton that are hidden by shadows.

To capture the colors of the painting, I decided to use all the low instruments of the ensemble (tenor sax, trombone, and cello). These dark sounds capture the seriousness of this skeleton's silhouette as an image of death. A variety of percussion timbres then serve multiple functions. Some of the high-pitched sounds offer the stark contrast between the black background and the skeleton. Other lower sounds add to the ominous mood of the movement. To then capture the color black through sound, all the instruments play sustained notes in their low registers. This causes the overtones to cancel out, creating in turn a black sound. Finally, the trumpet is used in moments to provide the bright and sizzling sound of the burning cigarette.

Café Terrace at Night

While living with his brother in Paris, Vincent enrolled in lessons at the Salon de Paris to better his skills as a painter. However, the biggest benefit this served was to introduce him to other famous artists living in Paris at the time. Always a loner, it was a major change in his life to befriend fellow artists, such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Emile Bernard, who he would keep in contact with for the rest of his life. Upon making these new friends, Vincent was introduced to parts of city life that he had never experienced before, such as the café night life. Cafés served as social huts for these men to meet, drink, smoke, and discuss art with one another. Vincent was able to learn greatly from his new friends, but at the cost of his own well-being. Vincent even characterized these establishments as "a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad or commit a crime." After moving to Arles, he spent a considerable amount of time away from this lifestyle to recover from the damage to his health inflicted in Paris. However, once a fellow artist Vincent had met there, Paul Gaugin, started living with him in Arles, he soon returned to these detrimental nights.

As for the painting itself, many different aspects of it influenced my music. Skewed on an interesting angle, this image shows the nightlife of a café terrace in Arles that Vincent would have spent many nights at. The beginning works as the approach and arrival at this establishment. Bright and flashy colors in the music showcase the lively nature of this atmosphere, while sounds of many different conversations are passed around the ensemble, ranging from lighthearted to serious and intimate. Upon staying at a place like this and having a couple of drinks, all the different conversations start to blend together and interrupt

⁴ Cabanne, 143.

one another, as well as combine with all the other sounds of the city, such as insects flying through the air. The outro then serves as the departure, with the sounds of the café being heard as echoes from far away. Leaving the chaotic city night life that was just experienced, one can better appreciate the serene beauty of the starry night sky painted in the top right corner, which Vincent would become so famous for.

Starry Night on the Rhone

Of all the paintings Vincent created in his career, no collection is more highly regarded than his "starry nights." Much like the sunflowers, they have become his calling card. Coincidentally, he viewed the two images as being connected to one another, as shown by him regarding sunflowers as being "self-germinating stars" and stars as "nocturnal sunflowers." The light and arrangement of the stars in this painting are portrayed through the strings resting on top of top of the brass, who in turn create the nebulous, dark blue sky which surrounds them.

One reason that I prefer this starry night painting to the others is that it captures so much more than just the sky. Below it is the city of Arles, with all its bright light. Embodied through the whole ensemble, the colors of the music match that of the city. The surface of the Rhone river then reflects all the light of the city and stars, while flipping, broadening, and distorting it from the original image. Finally, in the bottom right of the painting are two figures, represented by the viola and cello, walking under the majesty of it all. The man on the left is none other than Vincent himself, identified through the straw hat that he painted in many of his self-portraits. However, the woman to his side is harder to identify. She could be

⁵ Cabanne, 133.

Agostina Segatori, who was a model Vincent dated for a short time while living in Paris; or a prostitute, since Vincent regularly paid for their company; or finally an unknown paramour that he dreamed was a part of his life. No matter who it is, this shows the companionship that Vincent longed for, to share these beautiful scenes with, "the symbol of an unattainable happiness."

(Still Life with) Shoes

During the time Vincent spent in Paris, learning how to paint better, he created a large number of still lifes. Meant to capture an image of certain objects, these greatly helped to build his skills as a painter. A great many of the still lifes were of flowers, including sunflowers. Others, like this one, were of random household objects. Despite the simplicity, it has the most symbolic meaning of any of these paintings to me. The shoes are dirty and well worn, probably belonging to a peasant or a vagabond. They are reminiscent of Vincent's early work that was greatly interested in capturing the essence of poor, rural life. Some may view these as the symbol of the dirty, mistreated life of farmers in a capitalist society. Others may view them simply as representing farmers kicking off their shoes and resting after a long, hard day of work in the fields.

To represent this painting in music, I utilized the two groups of instruments within the ensemble that have the most homogenous timbres: strings and brass. Both groups of instruments easily blend together, creating a mesh of sound. With this, I created the background of this painting, which is the most impressionist part of anything in this suite. It

⁶ Cabanne, 113.

⁷ Cabanne, 96.

⁸ Jameson, Post Modernism of the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 6-10.

is very unclear and hard to make out anything, besides the two shoes in the middle. The independent changes in every instrument playing thus creates a texture that is shapeless and constantly changing. Finally, the end focuses onto two pitches, split between the two groups, that represent the only clear image in the painting: the shoes.

The Potato Eaters

One of his earliest paintings, this is the epitome of the rural, peasant life that Vincent was greatly interested in at the beginning of his career. Most of this painting is dark, especially around the corners, with the light given off by the lantern only filling the middle. Clearly shown are the faces of four adults seated around a table of potatoes, harvested that day. In the middle of the painting is a small girl, with only the outline of her back being shown. Each of these figures and parts of rural life are represented through the sections of this piece, with the order going from left to right.

The man to the far left is the only male figure in the painting. He most likely would have been the one working in the fields, farming the potatoes by himself. The solemn expression on his face shows the labor of his work to provide for his family. This includes having to wearily walk home every day, carrying all the potatoes with him. To his right is the youngest and most well-lit woman in the painting, who is probably the farmer's wife. Her expression is far more optimistic and hopeful than her husband's. The small smile on her face, which is directed towards her tired husband and gives, is the most happiness sight in this dreary image. The face of the child in the middle is hidden, but there is a shining aura around her. Young and ignorant of the poverty that the adults in her family face, her music represents that of merry folk dancing. As unrefined as it may be, the sense of joy about having food and shelter is true and sincere.

However, directly next to her is the oldest figure in the painting. Wrinkles all along her face show the years she has witnessed and hardships experienced. Finally, the figure on the far right is yet another elderly woman. Appearing the most downtrodden, with her face pointing down, she is reminiscent of the man on the other side of the table. Tired and burdened, she repeatedly performs the task of pouring cups of tea for everyone else. Like many of the tasks of peasants, this is done over and over again, to be enjoyed for a limit amount of time. Unfortunately, the reality is that these people will have to repeat the same labor the next day and every day after that in order to survive. To capture this, the first and last chords of this movement are identical to show this never-ending cycle of their lives.

Madame Roulin

While living in Arles, Vincent became good friends with the local mailman of the city, Joseph Roulin. Since Vincent wrote letters to his brother Theo every day, he and the mailman become well acquainted with one another. Eventually, Vincent offered to paint a portrait of the mailman as a token of gratitude. This eventually lead towards Vincent becoming close with the whole Roulin family and painting many portraits of all of them. This collection of paintings included portraits of the mailman, his three children (Armand, Camille, and Marcelle), and his wife Augustine.

Being the opposite of Sien, Vincent viewed Madame Roulin as a wonderful mother to her children. To him, she was "motherhood personified," "the embodiment of health, security and quiet happiness," and "symbolized life" itself. ¹⁰ Seeking to find the right colors to show her warmth and nurturing presence, he created five different versions of this same painting,

_

⁹ Cabanne, 136.

¹⁰ Cabanne, 176.

some of which created while he was hospitalized. This is what I aimed to capture in this movement: the sweet and lyric quality of a lullaby, with slow and gentle movement of rocking in the chair she sits in.

On the Threshold of Eternity

Near the end of his life, Vincent spent about a year in a mental hospital at Saint-Remy, which he instituted himself into for his own good. Recent turmoil with fellow artist Paul Gauguin, who lived with him in Arles, led towards him being incredibly unstable. In fact, the infamous act of Vincent cutting off his own earlobe occurred after a large argument between the two of them, with Gauguin deciding to move out of the home they shared. While in the hospital, Vincent would be allowed to paint occasionally when his manic episodes appeared to be under control. Not having a great amount of resources at his disposal, most of his works were drawings and a few paintings, such as this one.

Much of the work during this time was based on previous projects Vincent had done earlier in his life. The stance of the old man is incredibly similar to that of Sien's in *Sorrow* and the footwear is identical to that of (*Still Life with*) *Shoes*. These recollections of his own work inspired me to make this movement a post-modernist collage, which features excerpts from all the other movements of this suite. All material is recycled from the others and focused in a different lens that shows the chaotic mindset that Vincent lived in at the end of his life. Periods of calm peacefulness would be upset by sudden manic episode that had no warning or seeable ending.

After a period of relative wellness, Vincent left the hospital, moved to Auvers, and was cared for by a Dr. Gachet. The doctor was frequently away on business in Paris, which

left Vincent alone to paint undisturbed. Eventually, he started feeling guilty for the burden he was putting on his brother Theo, who was then married and recently had a child of his own. It became so unbearable that he shot himself in the chest, while painting in a wheat field, much like the ones he had spent so much of his career in. However, his death was not instantaneous but greatly drawn out. After stumbling home injured, Vincent spent his last hours bedridden as Dr. Gachet and his brother visited and watched his life fade away.

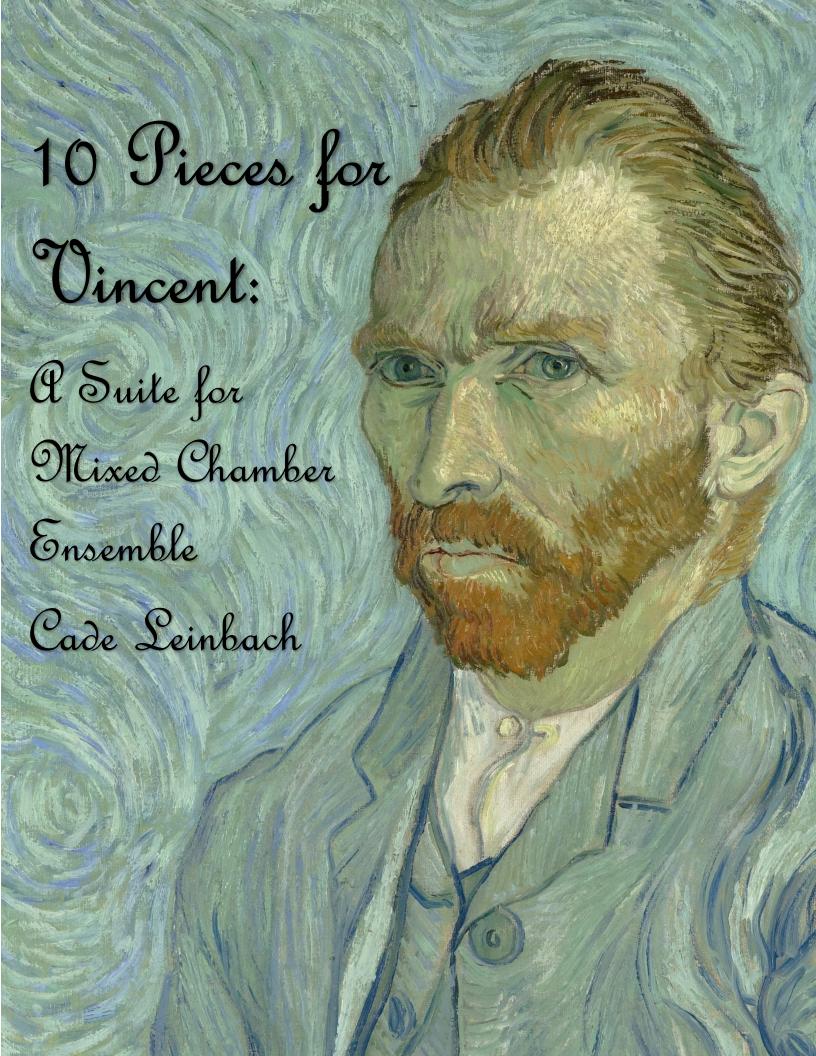
The feeling of waiting for one's own evitable death is the very essence of this painting. Whether it is the agonizing dread of knowing it will eventually come or, in Vincent's case, slowly dying a painful death, it is all something that must be faced, while standing on the threshold of eternity.

Resources Used:

Cabanne, Pierre. Van Gogh. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1963.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

Templeton Reid, LLC. "The Van Gogh Gallery." Published January 15, 2013. https://www.vangoghgallery.com



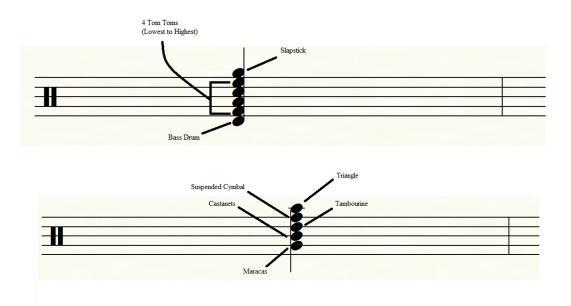
Program Notes:

This suite consists of 10 different pieces of music, each based on a specific painting by the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). In the short time span of a decade, this incredibly misunderstood man created some of the most iconic pieces of art in our culture. As a whole, this suite is meant to depict both the art and life of Vincent, while paying homage to this man who is still relevant in modern society, despite having died over 100 years ago.

These pieces can be performed individual or as a complete set. The order of the movements is left to the discretion of the programmer/director of the ensemble performing them. They can be played in chronological order of the paintings, from brightest to darkest, or in any order that can be imagine. The order they are found in this version is based on the world premiere of this work on March 31st, 2018. Each is distinct from the others and serves as its own piece of art, much like the paintings that they are based on.

Performance Notes:

The entire instrumentation is flute, clarinet (B-flat and A), tenor sax, trumpet in C, horn in F, bass trombone (or tenor), violin, viola, cello, and percussion. A percussion key is provided below as the instruments appear on the staff.



Mallets that are to be used are describe in the actual part, ranging from yarn to medium hard. Certain sections will then be played with drum sticks. Below are examples of some percussion extended techniques as they appear in the part with explanation.

<u>Tambourine Smack</u>: When playing the tambourine, an "x" note head indicates that the performer should smack the middle of the drum with their palm.



<u>Low Tom Thumb Roll:</u> In "Skull with Cigarette" and "On the Threshold of Eternity," the percussionist is asked to do a thumb roll on the low tom. It is marked by a "baseball diamond" shaped note head. To do this, the performer should rub their thumb or superball mallet along the rim of the drum head until a sustainable sound is accomplished.



<u>Cymbal Coin Scrape:</u> When playing the cymbal, a "upwards pointing triangle" head indicates that the percussionist should perform a scrape on the cymbal. This can be done by dragging a coin, metal beater, or any other like object perpendicular to the rings of the cymbal.



The movement "(Still Life with) Shoes" has specific instructions as to how it is to be performed. Every entrance is to be quiet and non-articulated, in an effort to create a texture of performers changing notes seamlessly and undetected. All instruments are written in C EXCEPT for Horn, which is written in F. Brass players should breathe before changing notes. Avoid breathing during sustained notes at all cost. If you desperately need to breathe, make sure to stagger breathe with the people around you so that that no 2 people are changing at the same time until the end. When a single pitch is notated on the staff, play it for the duration designated by the arrow.

Example:



When a box with multiple notes is notated, the performer should choose one of the notes given and sustain that for the intended duration.

Example:



When changing notes from box to box, always switch notes and never play the exact same pitch twice (even if it appears in both boxes). In the third system, strings are instructed to play multiple notes with in the box as a double stop, indicated by the asterisks. The combination of pitches is to the discretion of the performer. Time brackets are provided at the top each system to designate how much time should be allotted to complete the series of events

If there are any further questions, the performers should contact the composer at leinbachcade@gmail.com.

Cade Leinbach



















Sorrow

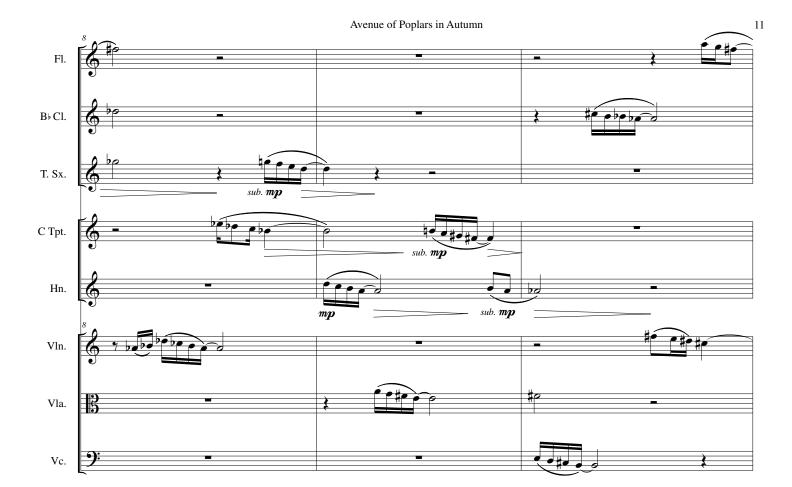


Sorrow 9



Avenue of Poplars in Autumn









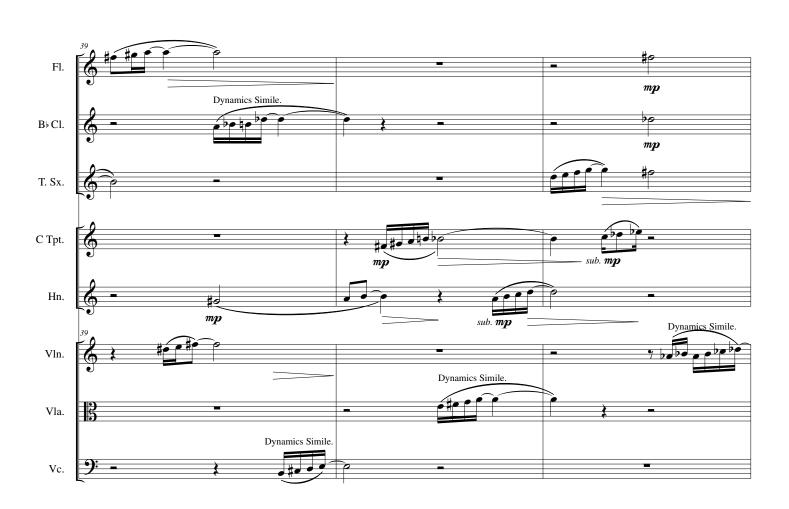




















Skull with Cigarette







Café Terrace at Night









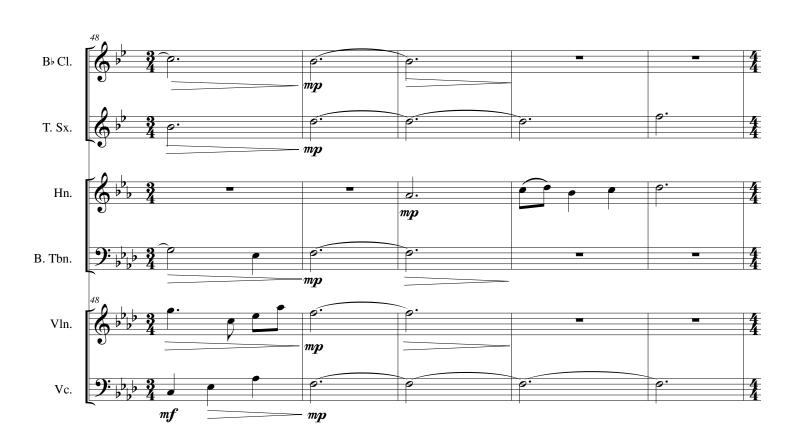


mp

mp

















Starry Night on the Rhône









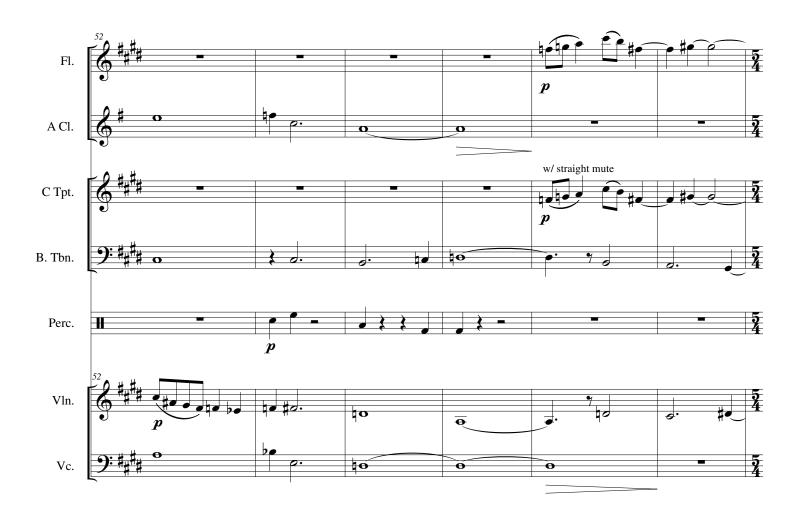








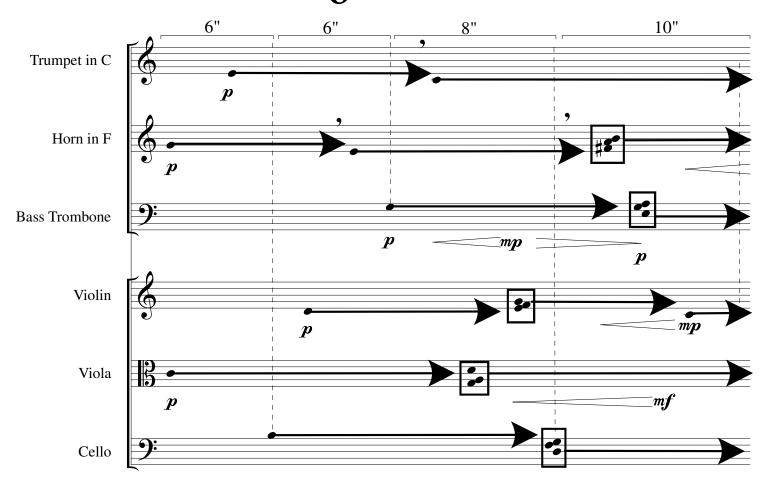


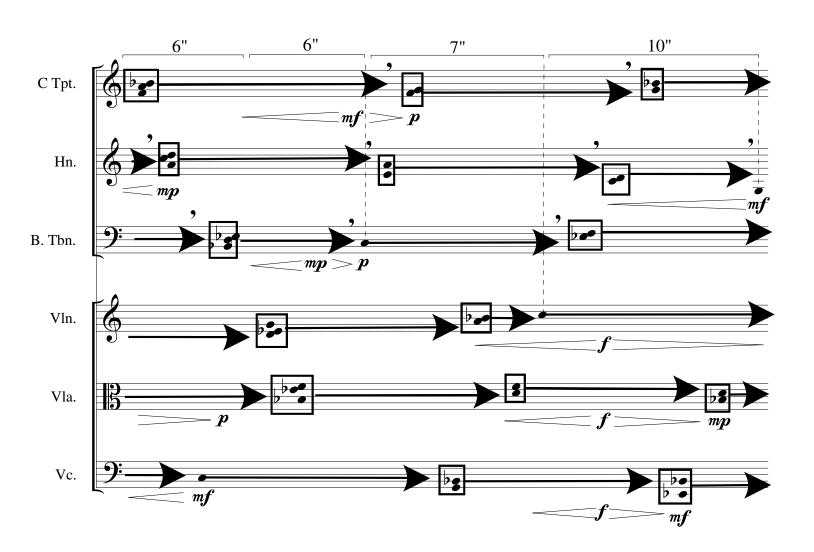


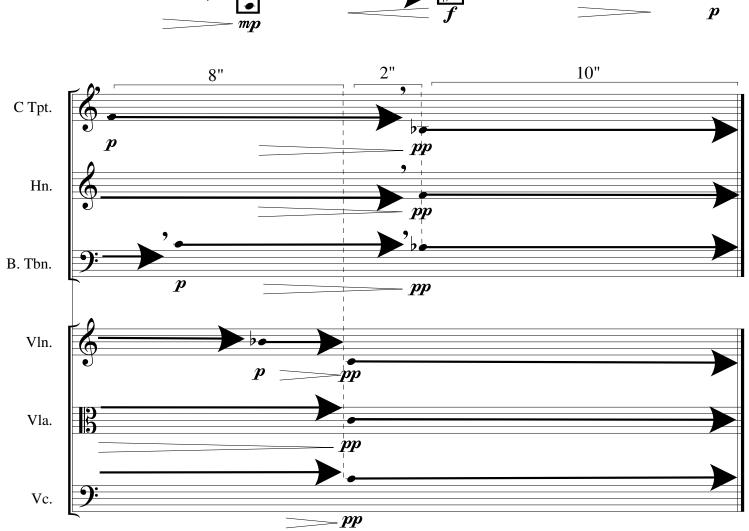




(Still Life with) Shoes







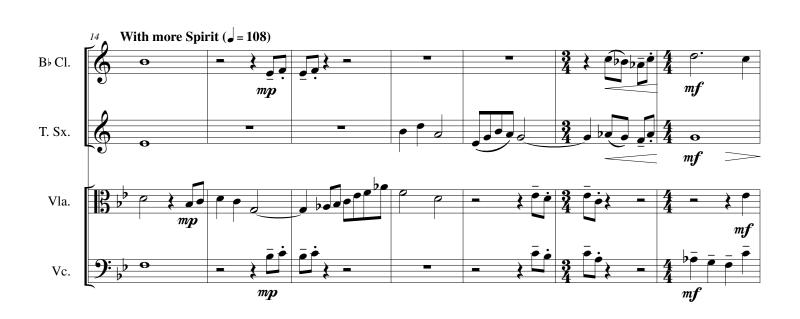
The Polalo Ealers





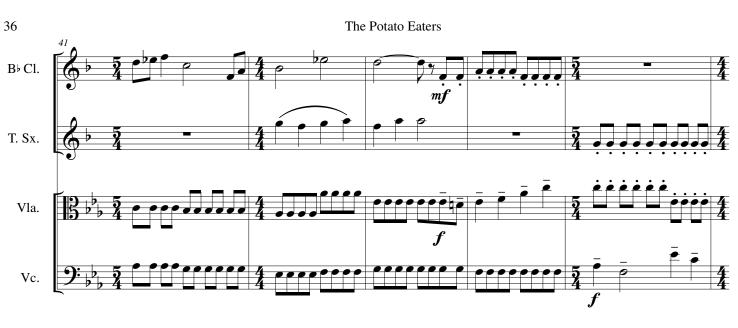


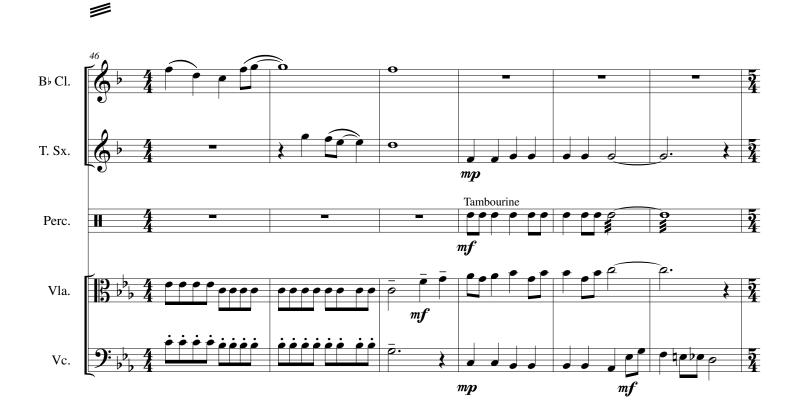




The Potato Eaters 35







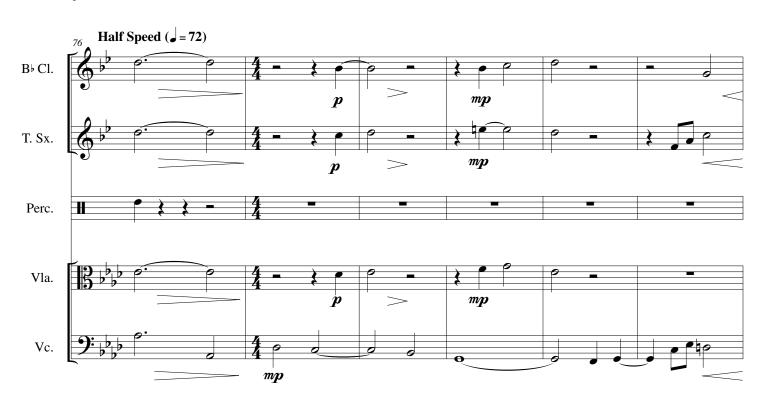


The Potato Eaters 37

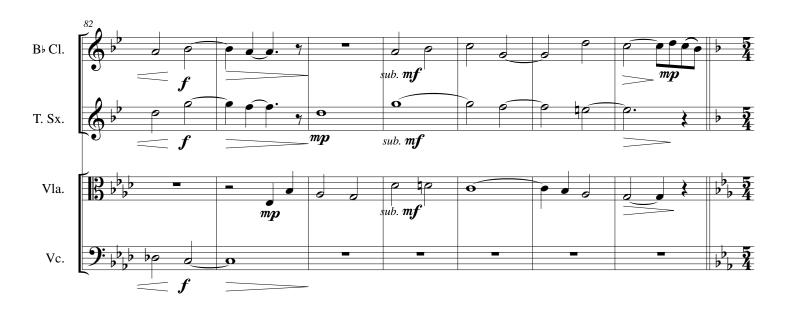




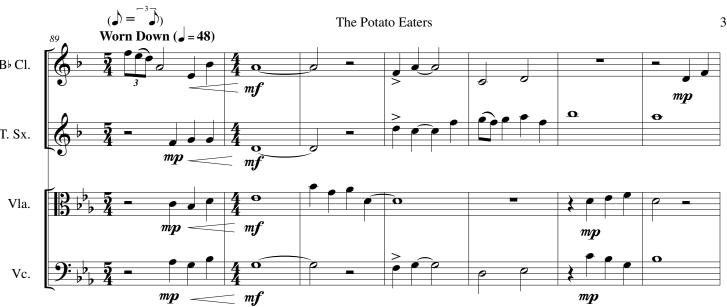
















Madame Roulin



Madame Roulin 41



On the Threshold of Eternity



























